

1878

A

LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

F—N—L—d A—r. K



D U B L I N :

Printed in the Year M,DCC,LXXIII.

L E T T E R



Advertisement.

RIGHT HONOURABLE
THIS letter was written soon after a speech to which it refers, was said to have been made in a certain august assembly ; but the great distance at which the author lives, prevented its appearing sooner in public.



D U B L I N :

Printed in the Year MDCCCLXXIII.

To the R——t H——ble

J——n, L——d A——y.

My L——d,

NEITHER your station nor title, nor, what is more, your distinguished and acknowledged abilities, make such a difference between us, as to render me incapable of knowing facts with which I am daily conversant on the spot, or to exempt your L——p from error in matters, from the scene of which, you live at a distance; and for accounts of which you must of course trust to hearsay. I hope therefore it will be no breach of any due respect if I endeavour to set right, both your L——p, and others whom your assertions and reasonings may have misled, in some points thus circumstanced: especially as they are points of material consequence to the interest, peace, and reputation of a body of men to whom I do not imagine your L——p an enemy, and whose conduct towards the public, I would fain flatter myself

myself with charitably thinking, has not deserved that acrimony of indignation which I have sometimes heard expressed.

Your L——p was pleased some time ago, in a most august assembly, to attribute the numerous emigrations from the *North*, to the practice of employing tithe-farmers as one great cause: this practice to the absence of beneficed Clergymen (gone it seems to *Bath*, or elsewhere) and thence to infer the propriety of excluding tithe-farmers, and those who employ them, from the benefit of all the laws for ensuring the provision for the Clergy.

Now, my L——d, although I am firmly persuaded that, from the nature, population, and other circumstances of the country, and from the genius of the people, *Ulster* would send out its swarms, though there were neither tithe-farmers nor tithes; yet I shall not enter into the question what the cause of the emigrations is: all my business is to shew that what your L——p has assigned as a cause, is not really one.

Tithes are not the cause of the emigrations. If they were, they must have become a more intolerable grievance of late years than formerly. Whereas, I know in some instances, and have strong reason
to

to believe, that over a great part of the Province (except where the quantity of corn-land has received considerable additions, or from some other accidental circumstance) the Clergy either do not receive from their parishioners more than they did forty years ago, or, if they do, the increase bears no proportion to the alteration in the real value of money, or to the rise of every thing else around them. Yet, my L—d, in districts where I know even the nominal amount not raised, I know of emigrations in abundance. And can the payment, by a multiplied number of people, of a sum of less, (or, say, of equal) real value with what was paid by much fewer inhabitants many years ago, be so much a greater burthen and pressure at present, as to make more people fly their country than ever were known to do so ?

The same reasoning in some measure, and the same knowledge of facts, of which your L——p, surrounded with higher objects, may easily be supposed ignorant, will overturn your L——p's position, that tithe-farmers have been a main cause of the Ultonians deserting their native land. For, my L—d, I know districts of the country where there are tithe-farmers, and I know others where there are not; and I believe it would be a hard task for your L——p, I am sure it would for me, to
make

make out from which of these the emigrants were most numerous.

Nor will your ascribing the practice of employing tithe-farmers entirely to the non-residence of the Clergy stand the touchstone of fact and experience one whit better; for this plain reason, that not only the non-resident, but frequently the resident Clergy, are obliged to make use of them.

Frequently obliged I say, my L—d, compelled, necessitated. And to deprive them of these necessary instruments of their subsistence can be justified on no principle but one, of which I solemnly and sincerely acquit your L——p, that of a desire to reduce exceedingly, if not to annihilate, that subsistence itself. A Clergyman's income in the *North*, of between two and three hundred pounds a year (for instance) is to be collected from (probably) upwards of five hundred different people: the very number is sufficient to make it a business almost adequate to a man's whole time: and I presume you do not wish that a man of liberal education and sacred profession should have no higher objects, no worthier attentions. But in such a number of people, not blest with all the advantages of education, how many may be supposed uncandid, unreasonable, unjust, fraudulent? inclined and practised to take every opportunity

tunity which the laws afford of harassing and cozening? or prone (as appears in numberless instances) to neglect, or even defy the law itself? How many will presume on a Clergyman's supposed ignorance of country business, on his aversion to one of the most teasing of human employments, his candor and lenity, or the decencies to which his profession obliges him? who would be much more ready to agree with, and much more punctual in their payments to, a person habituated to their own way of dealing, acquainted with their traffick and circumstances, whose chief employment were to attend to the business, and to watch that neither the fraudulent should evade, nor the negligent too long delay. So that, without supposing a tithe-farmer to be guilty of any thing (I do not say illegal, for that he dares not venture, but) injurious, or oppressive, he may, and not without a reasonable profit to himself, collect for the parish minister a more easy, certain, and punctual, if not a larger income. Even the Landlord, who receives his thousands from fewer hands than the poor Parson does his fifties, and who has so instant a remedy that he may be said to have the law in his own hands, even he finds it necessary to employ agents and receivers; and to allow them, not a fixed, but a proportionable emolument, in order, to make them find their own interest in advancing and securing that of
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their employer. Why then, if we may presume to make the comparison, why should the Clergyman be forbid the like resource? What is there in the circumstance of his having something to do for his income that should make this difference; or should bereave him of the right of a citizen to dispose of his property as he pleases, or to procure such assistance as he honestly and lawfully may, to collect what the laws of God and man have made his own? It is true that both the agent, and the tithe-collector, will become subject to the odium of the people; as will every human being that has the exacting of payments of any kind.

There is indeed this difference; that the Clergyman, not having a great or family property or weight in a country, cannot get men to brave this odium, as well as incur the hazards and difficulties with which his income is clogged, unless on higher terms; and often cannot procure a man of substance, or character, on which he can rely, to act for him in any way but that of a farmer, who pays a certain sum, and gets the overplus for his trouble and risk. Now, my L—d, if, by way of preventing or punishing non-residence, you preclude the Clergy in general from this method; what will be the effects? Numbers of the residents must be immediately plunged into all the inconveniencies which they ought to escape.

Many

Many unavoidable circumstances may render it distressing, or impracticable for them to perform the task to which you would compell them. Many of the qualities which constitute the character of an excellent Clergyman, render him peculiarly unfit for it: The more meek, the more pious, the more disinterested, the more studious he is, the softer and more polished his manners, the more (*cæteris paribus*) he will, beyond all shadow of doubt, be a loser by managing his own tithes. The more rough, turbulent, rapacious, worldly, crafty, suspicious, the less delicate his sense of character or exact decorum, the fitter he will be to make the most of them. And is the latter (if there be any such) the Divine you wish to serve, or to have others resemble? and the former the one you wish to be a sufferer? I am sure not so. But even those who do, as your L—p seems to wish all should, who receive their own revenues, they must be immediate sufferers by such a law: for that such a Clergyman is not defrauded more than he is, is owing to his having in his power, and the people's knowing that he has in his power, this resource of employing one who will not suffer them to defraud so much. To forbid tithe-farmers in general would therefore be to throw the Clergy for their subsistence on the mercy of the vulgar: and what that mercy is may appear from the manner in which so large a body of the Northern

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common people treat their own chosen teachers. Do not these poor Gentlemen, in the payment of that wretched pittance on the promise of which they have given up the prospects, and devoted the life and labours of a man of Collegiate education, meet with neglects, tardiness, and failures, which considering their circumstances, their families, and their dependance on the faith and honour of their people, I know not whether to stile more barbarous or base. This shews that it is not merely an aversion to the establishment, nor is it the non-residence or unpopularity of Clergymen, that occasions their being harrassed and defrauded: a truth which may admit of farther confirmation from observing what is often the case, that those of the established Clergy receive least in proportion to the real value of their property, of whom their people speak the best.

As to non-residence, I hope there is less of it than is pretended. But, whatever justifiable reasons or pleas of compassion may be urged in favour of it, as certainly in particular cases there may, I am not going to be its advocate. I wish not only your L——p, but every man of rank and consequence, held the prevalence of it, and every gross neglect of clerical duty and character, in serious and religious abhorrence. For then, their powerful recommendations, never employed but in favour of merit and
prin-

principle, would be sure to bring none into the church but men likely to be attentive to their charge. And thus, non-residence would be more effectually lessened, and a dislike to it more justly and properly manifested, than by confounding not only the innocently or unavoidably absent, but the resident, but the laborious, but the conscientious Pastor, with the objects of your disapprobation, and blindly aiming a stroke at the latter, which shall give a scar to the reputation, and draw blood from the property of all without distinction.

Suppose, my L—d, a Clergyman, after an education and a course of study equal to what might have qualified a man for making a fortune in some other profession, accepts a benefice of no great income in that part of the Kingdom of which we are speaking; resides, and discharges his duty conscientiously, so as to have no reason to think his conduct disapproved by his flock, or by his Country. He complies for a course of years with the general voice of his parishioners, and manages his own tithes: But, though these are acknowledged to be set considerably below the value, yet at length wearied with fruitless endeavours to bring numbers to any appearance of justice, or compliance with law, to any agreements or payments at all, finding the subsistence of his family yearly decreasing, the

arrears continually swelling to a frightful and desperate sum, his parishioners refusing to come into measures which might make their several payments, not greater, but more certain and regular; he resolves in fine to free his mind from continual anxiety, his heart from the galling and fretting of disputes and law-suits, and to secure at least that certainty and punctuality which make so considerable a portion of the value of a small income. Of these circumstances, there is not one minute, one imaginary, or exaggerated: and yet, my L—d, hard as they would be if such a law as your L——p seems to propose were about to take place, should such a man plead them to you, even though blest with an eloquence equal to your L——p's, what answer, upon your principle of arguing, must he hope to receive? Why this,—“*Quære peregrinum—*“ Can you deny that your rich neighbour “ is gone to *Bath*? And can you pretend to “ arraign the justice of a law, which for “ that reason entails ceaseless vexation on “ your gray hairs, and poverty upon your “ children?”

But it seems this mode of providing for the clergy was first adopted chiefly with this view, that the clergy in collecting the tithe might have a more immediate connection with their parishioners, and see thereby themselves who were able to pay, and where they

they ought to extend their benevolence and charity to the poor farmer, whom distresses or difficulty disabled from paying? If your L—p meant to assert it as an historical fact that this *was* the view; I shall beg leave to say, that no historian, I ever met with, assigns this reason: they mention others totally remote from it. If it be offered as an equitable ground for condemning Clergymen to drudgery and loss, I must answer, that, in the nature of it, tithe bears as exact a proportion as can well be devised to the circumstances of the farmer, to good or bad, to large or small crops: That a Clergyman has numerous opportunities, in the course of his duty, of knowing who are proper objects of charity, without being his own tithe farmer: but that if he be, either, he will listen to the numerous false pleas of poverty which in this business the country people have no scruple of making, and so give up to those who do not want what should supply those who really do; or he will resolve to shut his ears against them from the abundant probability of their falshood, and then it is the same thing as if a tithe farmer were employed; only with this worse consequence, that a danger is incurred of his growing more hardened and indifferent to tales of distress than otherwise he would be. Farther, as the framing a law which shall affect men's properties in order to force them to be charitable

ritable is, I conceive, a confounding the rights of justice with the claims of humanity, in a manner contrary to the principles of natural jurisprudence ; so, I should presume, the Clergy do not eminently of all orders of men, stand in need of a human law to compell them to beneficence ; and if they did, what will demonstrably lessen their powers of being charitable, seems not a very prudent or effectual means to make them so. Again : let it be considered that the same reasoning would prove that *the owner*, as a writer of the last age stiles him, *of nine parts in ten*, but who at this day may be called the receiver of twenty-nine parts in thirty, should be his own agent ; for it would be highly useful that he should know when to spare, and not insist on his rent : and yet I should be curious to see with what face an assembly of Gentlemen of landed property would receive the proposal of a law for obliging them to this. And lastly : I should wish to have it explained, whether if the parishioners poverty be owing to the rise of rents, this is to be supplied out of the Clergyman's subsistence : If this be the sense of our legislators ; far be it from me to controvert the equity of it ; all I desire is an authentic declaration of it, which might be of great use in determining such parents as are any way in doubt whether they shall educate any of their sons for the Church.

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If I have expressed myself with freedom, your L——p will readily excuse it, whose profession has taught you, and nobly shewn mankind, the advantages of Liberty to offer boldly every plea for even the semblance of truth and justice. It is, besides, so highly interesting to the public what men of your rank and character think and say; whatever falls from such an height makes such a deep, perhaps such a dangerous impression (as I wish your L——p's unreserved declarations on this subject may not have more serious consequences than you intended, when read and repeated among a people ever prone to murmur at the laws as oppressive, and fond to flatter themselves with hopes of encouragement from their superiors in opposing them) And it is therefore of such importance that persons in your sphere should be rightly informed, that truth ought to be pardoned, even if she does force her way to you with some appearance of boldness.

———Quam estis maxime
Potentes, dites, fortunati, nobiles,
Tam maxime vos æquo animo æqua noscere
Oportet—

I am, my L—d,

With proper Respect,

Your L——p's humble Servant,

An Inhabitant of Ulster.

THREE SERMONS

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